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ITALIAN VERSUS ENGLISH CHARACTER.

A STUDENT of the world's performances at the present time, who trusts to the English mind as a source of information, or looks to it as a philosophic guide through the mazes of political or social struggle, might as well follow in the wake of a stumbling blind man as he gropes through the turmoil and traffic of Broadway. Most applicable is this figure to any reliance upon newspapers. In relation to the late campaign in Italy, the newspapers, and especially that hydra-headed typographical monster, the London Times, teemed with false prophecies and misrepresentations of occurrences, put forth editorially and by authorized correspondents with a view to force the public to see things differently from what they really were. A reader of the newspapers finding these perverted statements, false rumors, "able editorials," etc., so often refuted, gets to be not only weary of them, but disgusted with the paper in which he sees them, and with the newspaper press as a responsible agent of communication with the public. English books (which are, indeed, the only true representatives of a "Press") are naturally supposed to be different, and some noble examples prove that they are so; the popular class of books, however, such as household libraries commonly contain, are about like the newspapers; they are written generally by superficial, prejudiced or obtuse minds, people who are intellectual enough to be smart, but not conscientious enough to be true.

A very popular book is "Life in Tuscany." We select it not so much to give information about Italy as to illustrate the type of books alluded to; we also take advantage of it to circulate some facts about Italy and Italians,—also about the English,—that are not generally known. "Life in Tuscany," judging by internal evidence, a clue to which may be obtained in the first extracts that we make, is written by an unmarried woman and an invalid, two conditions of life in a female that rarely favor extensive observation or sound judgment. Added to these the writer is English; the tests of her observation are *Personal comfort* and the *British constitution*; these are the corks that keep her afloat as a thinker on the sea of opinion. She is an observer of persons and things around her, a lover of nature, a good writer, and a conscientious one; this last quality alone makes her book more agreeable than similar efforts by many writers of the opposite sex; its objectionable features are due to the organic deficiencies of English character.

We introduce the lady to the reader, and the reader into Italy just at the time the lady takes possession of rooms in a peasant's house at Viareggio, a town on the shores of the Mediterranean, and one of the Italian Newports.

The house belonged to a "Contadino"—the name applied to a man of the peasant or working classes in Italy—but, both outside and inside, the dwelling was very unlike a Contadino's common residence, into which no person of civilized habits could dream of entering as a tenant. But yet, though light and cheerful, with whitened walls and large glass windows, the two

vacant apartments had not a very inviting aspect, in connection with the idea of even a fortnight's residence in them. No sofa or arm-chair offered to the tired or languid frame a luxurious lounge, and the eye wandered dejectedly over superannuated rush-seated chairs, invalided looking-glasses, which appeared as if they had just passed through a severe crisis of small-pox, and beds quite mountain-like in the altitude to which they rose. Still, as the sea stretched out before the windows so beautifully blue, as the air felt deliciously fresh, as the waves broke with such a melodious sound upon the beach, and as no other accommodation by the sea-side was procurable, a bargain was struck with the mistress of the mansion; and in a very philosophic (!) frame of mind, making sage remarks on the subject of the superfluities of existence, we entered on the possession of the rooms in question.

She hired them of a woman thus described :

Our landlady, Violante, was a perfect specimen of the Tuscan Contadina, the most hard-working, indefatigable specimen of human nature anywhere possible to find. With the earliest dawn of morning, almost before the cock had begun to crow, I heard her voice; and she still was bustling about long after I had lain down. How such an amount of energy, of strength and endurance could have been put into any feminine form, appeared to me a matter of surprise; but in the lean, sinewy frame of Violante, and in her furrowed brow, one read, as in a printed book, a history of long years of toil.

"It is a hard, hard life I lead," she said to me one day, in answer to a remark of mine; "but how can it be helped? My husband can do nothing now to earn his bread, and the burden falls on me to support him and our family. Ah! it was a great mistake I made when I was young, to marry; but I knew nothing then of what was before me—of the hard lot that falls to a wife and mother. And Giuseppe, too, though he is a good husband now, in former times used to get drunk and beat me. Ah! would to Heaven I had never married," she exclaimed, reiterating the wish I had so often previously heard uttered by the peasant women of Tuscany, "for the life I lead, still striving to earn a *quattrino* for my family's sake, whom I love too well, is a life of the hardest slavery."

Poor Violante! her family is pictured to us sitting before the threshold of a "neat, well-whitewashed dwelling," and enjoying the fresh air of an Italian moonlight evening. The group suggests a pleasant Italian composition, and furnishes collateral evidence in support of views of Italian character (by another writer) that are given further on.

We pass along a lengthened row of neat, well-whitewashed dwellings to where our temporary one, distinguished from its neighbors by an image of the Madonna decorating the front, invites our entrance with open doors. Before the threshold sit Moscardino and Violante, with different members of their family. There is Paolo, a youth of nineteen, who, to his mother's regret, is on the eve of marriage; and that, too, with Italian improvidence, to a woman poor as himself: there, also, is Caterina, a very handsome, dark-eyed girl, who thinks that human felicity consists in the possession of a silk dress and the wearing of a gold chain. There also stands lounging by, Mariana, a half-witted girl of sixteen, who looks as if an abhorrence of soap and water was the predominating feeling in her darkened mind. All rise at our approach, all wish us "*felice sera*" in a breath, and the ever hospitable Moscardino invites

us to sit down, which invitation, as the old gentleman's conversation is somewhat unintelligible, from the extreme volubility of his utterance, I decline. Violante hastens to bring lights: we ascend the stairs, and after exchanging a few words with our fellow-lodgers, two Lucchese ladies, whose apartments adjoin ours, we follow their example in preparing to seek repose.

"*Felicissima notte*," says Violante, in the soft dialect of Tuscany; "*Felicissima notte*," I respond; and, presto, clambering up the steep altitudes of my couch, and gaining the soft and sheltered summit of my Mont Blanc, I wish *felicissima notte* to Viareggio and the whole world.

While the lady sleeps, and before we arouse her to tell us something of Italian society, we have to state that her descriptions of the Italian watering places, the Baths of Lucca and the Baths of Monte Catini, of silk growing, the Campagna della Misericordia, etc., are highly entertaining. To her honor, be it recorded, she scarcely alludes to art. As a specimen of her descriptive powers, we quote the following picture of a sunset.

About twenty-three o'clock, as the hour before sunset is called in Italy, Viareggio, which looked as if it was indulging in a nap all day, begins to assume a wakeful aspect, and shows signs of life and animation. Bright green jalousies are thrown wide apart, while every balcony has its group of occupants, to enjoy the coolness of the evening air; and a little later, as the sun sinks lower in the west, from almost every house along the shore the inmates issue to bid the day good bye, from a favorite spot of rendezvous on the beach, or from a still more favorite wooden pier which stretches out beyond.

But few, however, are the loiterers on the beach compared with those who stroll onward to the wooden pier, which offers a pleasant lounge, as well as numerous seats to the idle throng. Here friends walk to and fro together, or sit side by side engaged in careless talk, while before their unheeding eyes extends a scene that, once beheld, stamps itself indelibly on the stranger's memory. Almost on the verge of the ocean bed, in which it would seem about to sink to rest, is seen the sun, no longer a globe of fire casting forth a furnace glow of heat and light, but a ball of burnished gold, shedding a golden radiance on water, earth, and sky. The windows of Viareggio flash like diamonds in the yellow light, and high above the town, and far extending towards the north, tower the splendid mountains of Carrara, with their bold summits and wooded slopes bathed in the most exquisite violet hues. Still further in the distance the bold headland of Cape Corvo, rising at the entrance of the Gulf of Spezzia, stands up in strong relief against the glowing sky. Lower and lower as the sun sinks toward the horizon, brighter and brighter glows the reflection of its golden hues in the flashing mirror of the sea; gaining, at length, the line, where sky and water seem to meet, one minute half its burnished surface is seen above the wave, in the next its rapidly dwindling crescent-form has vanished from the sky, which slowly pales into a silvery grey, while the purple tints upon the mountains merge into a twilight gloom. Night comes apace; but even as its darkening shadow falls around, a faint roseate light begins to creep up the western sky, as if the departed luminary were returning on his track again. Slowly spreading, the soft suffusion rises up on high, till a large portion of the vault of heaven glows with a ruddy light, that tinges faintly the calm expanse of water underneath. North, east, and south the darkness deepens overhead, while the round

orb of the moon grows bright and the stars appear. Some minutes pass, and then the West, seemingly loath to exchange the rich livery of the day for the sable hues of night, slowly, reluctantly, as it were, yields to the latter's irresistible sway. The outline of the distant headland melts into the darkened sky, and the nearer mountains seem to grow loftier in the deepening gloom. From the West the rich tints of sunset fade quite away; whilst the sea stretches out a dark expanse, save where the moonbeams fling a glittering trail; and in the illimitable depths of the dark blue vault above innumerable stars are sparkling brilliantly.

But beautiful as was the day in its decline, the night to which it yields possesses charms, though widely differing, of a not less attractive kind. Through the heated air a sense of coolness is diffused by the light evening breeze, which wafts slowly toward the pier small fishing barks belonging to the seafaring population of the town. Like diamond-dust gleam the myriad stars of the Milky Way, whilst the nearer stellar worlds illuminate the dark vault of heaven with their bright, sparkling lamps. In unclouded majesty the full moon pursues her upward course, marking the sea beneath with a rippling silvery trail. High up the side of the lofty mountains numerous fires break into view, which increase and wane till they successively expire. Mingled with the melodious roar of the breaking waves are faintly heard the joyous shouts and laughter of young girls, seen in the distance, by the bright moonlight, sporting in the waters of the surf-fringed sea. No sound that comes but falls melodiously on the ear, and not an object visible but seems to add to the soft beauty of the scene, from the mariner's distant warning light in the isle of Tino, scarcely visible to the eye, to the full-orbed moon shining through the clear depths of an Italian sky.

And this description of the home of the Italian image-venders, whom we encounter daily in our streets, holding out a Washington or a Venus, and appealing to us to "buy—very fine!"

Scarcely a year passes by that enterprising youths do not leave their native hills (Lucca) to seek their fortunes in England or America, by following for the most part the trade of modellers of plaster figures. Some years ago the profession was a good one, I was told by one of these vagrant artists, who had returned home with a fortune of five thousand dollars from America. "I used often to make," he said, "from nine to ten dollars a day; but now the business is overstocked; the lads of the present day who take to the same way of earning their bread, don't make half of that amount." This man had two brothers, modellers like himself; one had, like him also, returned enriched from America, the other had married and settled in England. Few, however, of these wandering mountaineers establish themselves in a foreign country, if they should happen to have secured by their exertions a sufficiency of means to enable them to live with the least degree of comfort in their native land. Little attractive to the stranger's eye as are the homes of the peasantry in the neighborhood of the Baths of Lucca, the natives of these hills find a charm in their dark, dirty, furnitureless, smoke-stained interiors, which the snug, clean, comfortable cottages of America or England do not in their ideas possess. With an intense yearning for country and kindred, the wandering modeller generally returns to spend his declining days under the shade of those chestnut trees, beneath which his earliest youth was passed. But sufficient as are for him the pleasures of that rough and rude existence to which he returns,

and the shelter of the roof under which he first drew breath,—indifferent as he is to unglazed windows and dirt-stained walls, so long as he has the means of indemnifying himself for years of toil by lounging about with a pipe in his mouth in listless idleness, far different is it with the American or English wife whom he brings back with him to his native land.

"Poor creatures! it is a terrible life for such as them," said an Italian woman, speaking on the subject to me. "I knew two; one died of a broken heart, the other at the end of two months left her husband, and went into service in an English family. Poor things! it wasn't to be wondered at certainly. They had never been accustomed, like our peasant women, from their youth to climb up steep mountain tracks, or to live upon chestnut or maize. Little did they think when they heard of the blue skies of Italy, of the kind of hard and comfortless life that the peasants amongst these mountains lead; they wanted meat to eat and tea to drink, and how were they to be had miles away from any place where such things are sold?"

The pictures of society are too numerous to catalogue; we take one or two of the most significant. As the lady almost begins the chapter on society with the following reflection, we quote it to give it currency:

It is an observation justified by experience, that children ordinarily inherit their mental and moral qualities from their mother. In the biographies of great men this fact is evidenced in a very striking manner, and proves how essential to the welfare and greatness of any state is the development of the mental and moral faculties of woman. By thus ordaining that children shall resemble their mother in mental and moral constitution, Providence seems visibly to interpose in behalf of the weaker sex, and to claim for them respect, education, and consideration; for practically does it say, through this means, to men, "If you desire that your sons should be clever, wise and good, develop as much as possible those qualities in woman."

We think the lady might share with the men the honors of human character! We wish that she had told us what is left after deducting a "mental and moral nature!" New York law will not allow a married man to touch the property of his wife, but permits the wife to do a separate business, and then compels the husband to pay his wife's debts! Legally and physiologically, women's rights seem to be advancing. But to Italian society. The first item treats of the unfortunate position of widows.

"My life is a burden to me," said a young Florentine widow to me, despairingly, one day.

"Why so?" I asked.

"Oh, Signor Carlo is so cross and unkind; he checks and thwarts me in every way," was the reply.

"And who is Signor Carlo, and what right has he to interfere with you?" I returned.

"Oh, Signor Carlo is a priest, whom my husband made a guardian over me, and intrusted with the management of my jointure and my affairs. Oh, it is really too insufferable!" she continued passionately. "Scarcely an evening passes that he does not come to make a note of my day's expenditure; and then, if he finds that I have exceeded the ordinary amount by even a couple of pauls, he knits his brows, and tells me that this must not occur again. And if he sees a nice blazing fire in the grate, he rebukes me for my extravagance. 'Signora Teresa,

you must not do this, and you must not do that,' he keeps on saying, till I cry with downright vexation. Then, too, if I want a new bonnet or a new dress, I have to beg and beg innumerable times before I can get the money to purchase it. It is too bad—indeed, it is—the way he acts; treating me like a child, though a woman of upward of thirty years of age. It is intolerable to be kept in this subjection; I would to Heaven I were an Englishwoman!"

"But why do you permit Signor Carlo to keep all your money in his hands, and to annoy you by his constant presence and interference?"

"*Cara mia*," she rejoined, "how can I help it since my husband willed that I should get my income solely through Signor Carlo's hands? And that is not the worst of my lot either," she continued; "that might be borne; but it is intolerable that Signor Carlo should be a spy on all my actions, keeping a constant watch on all I do."

"Why permit him? Why not tell him you will act as you choose?"

"I wish I could; but he has me completely in his power, for by my husband's will my jointure is to be transferred to a member of his family if I do not show I am a *buona vedova*,* and exhibit the most perfect discretion of conduct."

"Am I to understand that Signor Carlo is to be your judge in this particular?"

"Yes; and he is perpetually on the watch to see if I have got a lover. He thinks himself very cunning, I am sure; but sharp-eyed as he is, he has never yet discovered that Beppo comes here."

"Who is Beppo?"

"A young officer, a noble of Pisa, to whom I am engaged. Unfortunately he is too poor to marry yet, and so we must wait until he gets his next step, which will give him additional pay."

"You lose your jointure, then, if you marry, I suppose?"

"Yes, certainly; or if my engagement to do so be known. It is really droll to think of the way that Beppo has to be smuggled off when Signor Carlo arrives unexpectedly."

"You will be glad when this thralldom is at an end?"

"If it were not for that prospect, I would not live," she exclaimed; "or at least not live on in the way I do. If it were not for Beppo, I should do something desperate, I am sure."

And the second is one describing a school for young ladies, perhaps the *alma mater* of the widow.

At a very early period of my residence in Tuscany, the mockery of the mis-called system of feminine education in Italy became to me most strikingly apparent. The most favorite schools for Florentine girls are those conducted by nuns, and carried on within the precincts of the convent, but there are educational establishments to be found in Florence unconnected with the religious institutions of the country. To an annual examination of the girls belonging to a school of the latter description I was invited shortly my arrival in Florence, when I was as yet but imperfectly acquainted with the Italian language. Though doubtful of my ability to understand a scholastic examination carried on in an unfamiliar tongue, I accepted the invitation, and repaired at the time indicated to the appointed place.

Great preparations had been made for the occasion, as if to invest the coming exhibition with a character of importance and dignity. Across the end of the room, where the examination

* Good Widow.

was to be held, extended a stage, gaily decorated with bright-colored drapery. Upon this stage a table and some chairs were placed for the use of the examiner and the pupils, and directly in front were several rows of forms appropriated to the service of the audience. The room filled rapidly, and the benches were well furnished with occupants, when a grave, middle-aged man emerged from a mysterious side door and took his place on a seat occupying a central position on the platform. On either side of him four or five girls, of ages varying apparently from ten to sixteen, ranged themselves in order. The ladies, of whom the company entirely consisted, kept a profound silence, as befitted the importance of the scene, and the examination began.

My doubts as to the sufficiency of my knowledge of the language was soon dispelled, for I speedily found that my endowments in this respect were most ample for all the requirements of the occasion; the questions asked being characterized by a ludicrous degree of simplicity. Difficult, indeed, it was to restrain a smile, when I heard girls, almost womanly in their appearance, required to tell how many vowels there were in the Italian language; and further, to exhibit a convincing proof of their knowledge on this point, by furnishing words in which the vowels severally occurred.

"Right, quite right," said the professor, applaudingly, as a girl mentioned *boccu*, in exemplification of the use of the letter *o*; "and now," he continued, in his consequential manner, "I write this word *bocca* (mouth) upon this slate: you see it there; and I require you to tell me what letter it is necessary to add in order to convert *bocca* into *boccia*" (bottle).

The question was too abstruse for the girl addressed to answer; but the pupil next questioned solved it triumphantly.

An examination conducted by the French master was of an equally puerile and absurd character. After requiring the French for—I, thou, she, it, etc.—requirements not always successively complied with—he proceeded to make his pupils apply their knowledge of the personal pronouns to the conjugation in French of the phrase, "To gain one's livelihood." "I gain my livelihood," said one girl; "Thou gainest thy livelihood," said another; and so on round the circle, until "They gain their livelihood" was attained. In geography and history not even the most superficial examination took place; and when the morning's performance came to an end, I could not help wondering at the display I had witnessed of gross incapacity on the part of the teachers, and gross ignorance on the part of the taught.

An evening exhibition that took place on the same stage, was, in its way, of a much more meritorious kind. Though the school was a large one, the same young ladies who had exhibited their attainments in the morning, and who were evidently considered the show pupils of the establishment, once more appeared upon the stage to display their dramatic and elocutionary powers. French poems were recited with fluency and considerable grace, by girls who had shown a far from intimate acquaintance with French pronouns a few hours previously. Then came a play, which was acted in a very creditable manner; and the examination concluded with some waltzing, which evidenced that the art of dancing was, above all other branches of learning, the one most thoroughly cultivated and understood.

To all of this we can only exclaim, with Lord Allcash, "Shocking, positively shocking!" If we were satisfied that the standard of female education here or in England was beyond reproach—that results antagonistic to the natural

growth of a woman's nature were not equally objectionable in both worlds, we would seriously indorse the censure of our author; but—thereby hangs a tale, and so we pass on. Our next quotation is a similar judgment of Italian young men.

"Love, music, and poetry is the life of an Italian," exclaimed, one day in my presence, a young Florentine gentleman. Unfortunately for Italy, the observation was too true: Italian youths, epicureans in theory and practice, too often fritter away their time and energies in the pursuit of mere enjoyment; and too often, through the means of a vicious career of self-indulgence, their natural capacity for good is well nigh extinguished, if not wholly destroyed. Early in life the frivolous tone of Italian society exerts its enervating influence over the youthful mind. Few are the youths belonging to the upper and middle classes of society in Italy, who resolutely set themselves to achieve an honorable independence. Clinging to their kindred for support, necessity alone drives them to exercise their energies for the purpose of acquiring the means of subsistence. The idlers can be counted by tens, the workers by units. The tone of thought which ruled society in Tuscany in the days of the Medici is extinguished utterly; for industry now is looked upon as vulgar, and idleness as genteel. The lad of fifteen apes the man—apes him in the levities, and too often the vices of his career: the youth of twenty is thoroughly a man of the world, intimately acquainted with the world's worst features. Frivolities become the serious duties of his existence: he sings—he dances—he gossips—he flirts—as if life were given him for no higher aims and occupation. So long as he can find the means to buy light kid gloves, attend the opera, and pay his café bill, he lives on, contented with his position; his future troubles him not, so long as his present wears an agreeable aspect. "*Vive la bagatelle*," is his cry: "life is short, let us enjoy it whilst we may;" and, acting upon this creed, youth vanishes in a round of folly—in a whirl of excitement, that cannot but be as destructive to the moral principle as it is inimical to the development of all the higher faculties of the mind.

But whilst thus characterizing the youth of Italy as a class, it would be unfair to deny that there exist many exceptions to this rule. Doubtless, amongst the young men of Italy, there are to be found many to whom patriotism supplies a motive to exertion and an object in which they worthily invest their sympathies. But whilst admitting this, it must be owned that, if credit is to be given to the words of Italians themselves, there is but a small amount of singleness of purpose, unselfishness of endeavor, and honesty of action, to be found amongst the ranks of the upper classes of their countrymen. It was a melancholy thing to me, to hear the strictures passed by Italians upon themselves. Distrust seemed to me to be widely prevalent; each man appearing to suspect his neighbor of being actuated by merely selfish aims. In Rome and Naples I have heard Italians lament their unfitness as a nation for free institutions from the low moral tone existing amongst themselves. "*Siamo troppo cattivi*" (we are too wicked) for free institutions, said to me a Roman gentleman belonging to the anti-papal party; and this is the opinion of many a one in various parts of Italy.

Refutation is now in order. In respect to the last extract we have the evidence of a better authority. A writer in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* says, "Whoever has dwelt in this beautiful country, can he forget the frequent assemblies of

earnest men to which the young would resort with the greatest enthusiasm, where literature, politics, and science were the order of the day, and where a taste for study developed itself so rapidly and successfully?" This writer conceived this taste to be a remarkable phase of Tuscan character. Again, the short-sightedness of our author in her estimate of Italian young men is to be seen when we compare her statement with the acts of this class in the late war, many of whom it is well known had scarcely seen a musket during their lives, but who, at the call to arms, responded eagerly, cheerfully submitting to every hardship that the soldier is liable to. The author of "Life in Tuscany" attributes the objectionable features of Italian society chiefly to bad government. This would be well enough to cite as *one* cause among many, but it is not the only one. She asserts that "with purity of morals will be found associated national independence, wealth, and power;" probably because these latter characteristics belong to the present condition of England. If one assertion can be admitted as an offset to the other, we believe that Italian morals, although not reflected by "wealth, power or national independence," are as pure as English morals, just as we believe that the lower classes in Italy are superior both in situation and character to the lower classes in England. And this brings us to the serious portion of our comment.

One of the chapters in "Life in Tuscany" is devoted to the Peasant. This chapter contains interesting descriptions of all kinds; it tells us about the food, the comforts, the appearance, occupations, and the manners of the peasant; coupled with these features of peasant life are sundry details of agriculture and productions of the soil. How far out Miss Crawford is in her conclusions may be seen by contrasting her assertions with the evidence of wiser and better observers. One thing must be said in justification of Miss Crawford. She saw the land and homes she describes after several years' duration of the vine disease, an epidemic which produced misery in Italy analogous to that in Ireland caused by the potato rot. The first extract we make describes a peasant's home.

To see the actual state of things with the Tuscan peasant, let us visit him in his home, selecting a fine day in early summer for this purpose. Quitting the high road, we take a narrow pathway winding through the fields in the direction of a substantial-looking two-storied house, whose red-tiled roof is seen rising above an intervening screen of foliage. Every yard of our progress, as we advance, is marked by features that cannot fail to be admired. On either hand are luxuriant crops of grain alternating with strips of lupin, vetches, peas, and beans, intersected by rows of vines, whose long branches, hanging in rich festoons as they trail from tree to tree, close in the view in every direction; not a rood of ground we traverse but bears the mark of neatness, care, and industry. No weeds, no crooked fences, no yawning ditches are visible—all waste of space, all waste of soil by useless vegetation seem scrupulously avoided. Until we reach the immediate precincts of the dwelling, the rich picture is not marred by one unpleasant feature; but once there

—arrived at our destination, the whole character of the scene undergoes a complete metamorphosis. The evidences of neatness, care, and abundance disappear, giving place to signs as unmistakable of dirt, slovenliness, and poverty. The dwelling, which viewed from afar had an air of comfort and respectability, appears on close inspection a cheerless and utterly comfortless habitation; discolored walls, wood-work from which almost every trace of paint has vanished, windows without sashes or glass—mere large square apertures in fact, crossed at regular intervals by iron bars—present themselves to notice; and the vacant space before the entrance door is littered over with rubbish.

Inside, a still more dreary sight awaits us; stepping across the threshold we enter a good-sized apartment, which serves at the same time as kitchen and sitting-room for the inhabitants of the dwelling. The light that enters freely through the large unglazed casement reveals walls begrimed with smoke and dirt, and blackened rafters. A bench here, a table there, a stool and two or three decrepit-looking rush-bottomed chairs, with a few pots and pans, compose the whole amount of furniture visible. Ascending by a steep ladder with a hand rail, serving as staircase, we gain the second story, and find the characteristic features of the scene below repeated in the foul, comfortless, and almost furnitureless rooms, which are used as sleeping apartments by the members of the household. Harmonizing well with the aspect of the interior is the appearance of the mistress of the dwelling; a dirty slattern, without shoes or stockings, clad in a coarse gingham dress, become from the effects of dirt and age of a kind of nondescript color; her face, arms, and neck are, through exposure to the sun, tanned to a dark brown hue, and a quantity of black, tangled, dishevelled hair peers forth from beneath a red cotton handkerchief covering the back part of the head, and tied beneath the chin. The children, clustering around in scanty, tattered garments, with shlocks of uncombed hair, and faces guiltless of any but a most remote acquaintance with soap and water, correspond in air and aspect with the maternal model. From a scene so little accordant with our expectations we turn away with a sensation of mingled wonder and sadness; and, retracing our steps, marvel at the strange discrepancy that exists between the peasant's neat, trim, luxuriant fields, and his dirty, slovenly, poverty-stricken habitation.

As regards the majority of the peasantry in Tuscany, the scene described presents no exaggerated picture of the homes belonging to the mass of the rural population.

The second speaks of the food.

Poor in quality, and often scant in quantity, is the food which sustains the lives of the Tuscan peasantry. When the landlord's share is deducted out of their small patch of wheat, the portion that remains serves but for a short time to afford a supply of white bread for family use. In the absence of this luxury, a dark, vile-looking compound of rye and other inferior kinds of grain, made into a thick flat cake or clumsy roll, is generally eaten. Acting upon the idea that things are not in many cases at all so bad as they appear, I ventured on the experiment of trying the unattractive-looking fare; but found that in this case, at least, the decision of the taste fully confirmed the judgment of the eye; for, though I am very far from being dainty on the score of food, and am even obnoxious to the reproach of having eaten, with positive relish, dinners which have been indignantly denounced as insults to civilization and humanity, I must in truth confess that it would require me to be tolerably far advanced in

the process of starvation, before I should feel the least inclination to repeat the experiment I made on the black bread which constitutes the Tuscan peasant's staple food.

The French or kidney bean forms a favorite article of food; the young pod is not eaten as with us, but the bean only, in its maturity. Every peasant has his patch of beans; and this vegetable seems to rank in popular estimation above the potato. Rather a strange preference it seemed to me; for though I strove to divest my mind of every insular prejudice, and to attain to an exemplary judicial state of feeling on the question, I could come to no other decision than that the merits of a dish of potatoes were incomparably superior to those of a dish of kidney beans; particularly when the latter was served up in oil, the usual and favorite condiment to everything.

Black bread, kidney beans, and porridge made of Indian corn constitute, it may be said, the fare of the Tuscan peasant. Occasionally he has in the summer or autumn season a few luxuries, such as peas, tomatoes, cherries, figs, and chestnuts* to vary his unattractive food. Milk he seldom tastes, for the Italian peasant's cow is looked on as a means of rearing calves, and not of providing a nutritious beverage for himself and family; and butter, it may be said, as a general rule, is absolutely unknown. The wife of a peasant possessing several cows asked me one day what it was, then how it was made, and listened to my explanation with much apparent interest and curiosity. The butter I used at the baths of Monte Catini came some thirty miles, from the dairy farms at Florence; and at Albano, a town containing several hundred inhabitants, the luxury was unprocureable; indeed, it is only in those places in Italy where the English congregate, that butter is entitled to take its place in the list of Italian produce.

And the third of the appearance of the men and women.

Did the peasant women of Tuscany pay more attention to their appearance; were they neater, cleaner, and tidier in their persons, they would decidedly, in regard to looks, be entitled to considerable praise; for nature has been for the most part decidedly liberal and kind to them in that respect. But as it is, with their uncombed locks, their dirty faces, their slatternly style of dress, and their complexion spoiled by exposure to the weather, notwithstanding their large, bright, hazel eyes, their white teeth, and their thick tresses of black hair, they often present an exterior far from agreeable. The bloom of youth fades rapidly, owing to the hard life they lead, and owing also, perhaps, in some degree, to the senseless sort of out-door head-dress they wear, which leaves their faces completely exposed to a summer's scorching sun. Strange it is, that almost universally in every land and clime, in every class of society, we find the dictates of comfort and convenience completely disregarded and set aside by women, in reference to the form and fashion of their attire. In Tuscany, where the mid-day's summer sun shines with a dazzling, blinding glare—where the heat from the same source pours down with a scorching intensity—the peasant women seem to have been unable to devise a better covering for the head than a large straw hat, the limp leaf of which, instead of shading the face, for the most part hangs or flaps back quite over the crown, or a cotton handkerchief folded crosswise, placed on the back part of the head and tied by its two long ends beneath the chin. In neither case is the face protected from the

heat, or the eyes shielded from the light, in the least degree; the effects of this exposure are seen in the coarse reddened skin, and in the forehead prematurely furrowed by the instinctive effort made to screen the eyes from the dazzling glare: an effort that results in the habitual contraction of the brows. In the country districts only on *festa* days, when their best attire is donned to go to mass, do the countrywomen ever resort to any means to shade their faces from the sun; and then the means employed to effect this purpose wears to a stranger's eye quite a ludicrous air, consisting, as it does, of a large fan held up perpendicularly before the eyes.

The observations made in reference to the appearance of the peasant women of Tuscany will also apply in a great degree to the exterior of the men: very good-looking specimens of humanity, for the most part, are they, with their Sunday faces and their Sunday clothes; but on working-days their unwashed and poverty-stricken look detracts considerably from their natural advantages. Though in stature below the average English height, as are the women also, they are, for the most part, strongly and symmetrically formed—a circumstance that appears something of a marvel, considering the barbarous system of compression to which infancy is universally subjected in Italy, by the means of swaddling clothing. Ignorant as they are, the manners of both the men and women are characterized by a politeness that, coming from the heart, is far more winning than the cold courtesy which is the offspring of artificial rules; and very pleasantly and melodiously did their "*felice giorno*," or "*felice sera*," with which they never failed to greet me, fall upon my ears. On entering their dwellings, the inmates there would exert themselves to perform the rites of hospitality to the stranger visitor; and whilst many a regret was expressed that they had not a glass of wine to offer me, I was often presented with fruit and flowers, and in default of these, some young pea or bean pods (the contents of which it is the custom to eat raw in Italy) were put into my hands. Could I not stay a little longer? and would I not come again? were the phrases I constantly heard on my taking leave; and the burden of many an unfulfilled verbal obligation in this regard is resting on my conscience to this day.

We now give an extract from Sismondi, an authority quoted by a British author of a noble stamp (Mill). Sismondi's testimony "has the advantage of being specific and from accurate knowledge; his information being not that of a traveller, but of a resident proprietor, intimately acquainted with rural life. His statements apply to Tuscany generally."

"A peasant's house, constructed with good cemented walls, consists always of at least one story, sometimes two, above the ground floor. Generally, the kitchen is upon the lower floor, also a stable for two horned cattle, and a storehouse, which takes its name, *tinaia*, from the large receptacles there, in which the wine is fermented; it is in this place that the cultivator locks up his casks, oil, and grain. He always possesses a shed built against his house, in which he works under shelter at mending tools or cutting up fodder for his cattle. On the first or second story are two, three, and frequently four sleeping apartments . . . The largest and most airy room is devoted by the cultivator during the months of May and June to the

* Chestnuts form a staple article of food only in the mountain districts where they are grown.

rearing of silk-worms; large coffers for keeping clothes and linen, and a few wooden chairs, are the principal pieces of furniture, to which is to be added the walnut wardrobe of the wife, which she brings with her upon her marriage. The beds are without curtains or valances, but upon each one, besides a good straw tick filled with the elastic straw of Indian corn, there are one or two woollen mattresses, or with the poorer class, made of tow, a good quilted coverlet, heavy linen sheets, and on the best bed, belonging to the family, a kind of silken covering which is displayed only on fête days. The sole chimney in the house is for the kitchen; in this apartment is found the large wooden table, on which is spread the family dinner, with benches around it; the large chest, which serves at once for a safe to keep bread and provisions in, and a kneading-trough; a moderate and economical assortment of pots, plates, and cups in *terra cotta*; one or two brass lamps, a Roman scale, and at least two copper vessels used to draw and to preserve water in. All the linen and all the clothes used by the family are woven by the women of the household. These clothes, both for the men and the women, are of stuff called *mezza lana* when thick, and *mola* when light. The woof consists of a coarse hempen thread, the filling being either wool or cotton; it is dyed by the same hands that weave it. One cannot readily understand, even by constant labor, how the peasant women are able to accumulate such quantities of linen and *mezza lana*, so many clothes that are found in the common collection—how each member of the family can possess so many shirts, vests, pantaloons, petticoats and frocks. In order to make it intelligible we give an inventory of part of a peasant-family wardrobe, etc., that we are acquainted with; it represents neither the poorest nor the richest of its class; the family lives happily by the labor of its respective members upon half of the product of less than ten acres of land.

"Inventory of the *trousseau* of Jeanne, daughter of Valente Papini, on her marriage with Giovacchino Landi, the 29th April, 1835, at Porta Vecchia, Pescia:

"28 chemises, 3 colored silk dresses, 4 colored silk frocks, 7 cotton frocks, 2 winter working dresses (*mezza lana*), 3 frocks and skirts for summer work (*mola*), 3 white skirts, 5 aprons of printed linen, 1 apron of black silk, 1 apron of black merino, 9 working aprons colored, 4 white handkerchiefs, 8 colored handkerchiefs, 3 silk handkerchiefs, 2 embroidered veils and 1 plain veil, 3 napkins, 14 pair of hose, 2 hats (one felt and the other fine straw), 2 gold cameos, 2 gold earrings, 1 head-dress with two R man dollars, 1 coral collar with gold cross . . . Richer wives have in addition to these, *la veste di seta*, the full dress silken costume, which is worn but four or five times a year.

"The men have no *trousseau*; the husband of this woman, when married, had but 14 shirts and the rest of his wardrobe in proportion. At present the couple have but 13 pair of sheets, whilst in the family of his wife there are 30 pair. The dowry of this woman was fifty crowns, of which twenty were paid in cash and the rest at intervals, at the rate of two crowns per annum. The Tuscan crown is equal to six francs (\$1 20). The ordinary dowry for peasant girls, when the farms are larger, is about 600 francs.

Does this look like poverty such as is reflected by "Life in Tuscany?" "In relation to food," Mr. Mill says, "Very little can be inferred from a traveller's impression of the poor quality of their food. Its unexpensive character may be rather the effect of economy than the effect of necessity. *Costly feeding is not the favorite luxury of a southern people*; their diet, in all classes, is principally vegetable; and no peasantry on the continent has the superstition of the English laborer respecting white bread." The nourishment of the Tuscan peasant, according to Sismondi, "is wholesome and various; its basis is an excellent wheaten bread, brown, but pure from bran and from all mixture."

We have not sufficient space to quote the details of an Italian peasant's meals; sufficient to say they are provided with such food as naturally belongs to the soil and climate they are dependent upon. On this point, and, indeed, the condition of Italian peasantry, in every respect, they do not as human beings suffer to the same extent, morally and physically, as the subjects of the British crown in Ireland, or in the manufacturing cities of "free and enlightened England."

Furthermore, of the intelligence of this most interesting people M. de Sismondi speaks in the most favorable terms. "Few of them can read; but there is often one member of the family destined for the priesthood, who reads to them on winter evenings. Their language differs little from the purest Italian. The taste for improvisation in verse is general. The peasants of the Val de Nievole frequent the theatre in summer on fête days, from nine to eleven o'clock in the evening; the entrance costs them but little more than five French sous. Alfieri is their favorite author; the entire history of the Atridæ is familiar to these people, men who know not how to read, and who seek in the works of this austere poet some recreation from their severe labors." Unlike most rustics, they find pleasure in the beauty of their country. "In the Val de Nievole there is before every house an area devoted to the threshing of wheat, which is rarely more than 50 or 60 yards square, often the only level space that one encounters on the farm. It is at the same time a terrace overlooking the plains and the valley, and which commands a view of a lovely country. Rarely have I stopped to admire the scene without finding the cultivator by my side, coming to join me in my admiration, and to point out to me with his finger the beauties that he supposed might have escaped me."

Facts and opinions are but poor material to reflect on, when he or she who employs them is prejudiced or incompetent. Of all travellers who write on foreign countries, the English are, generally, the most unfair. What has been reported of our own country is the best proof of this assertion. They probably desire to be just, and are so to a certain degree; but the justice of what they say is based upon what an English nature only is capable of perceiving and cherishing. The lady who wrote "Life in Tuscany" seems not to aware that the Italians have a peculiar phase

of human nature to illustrate the beauty of (as well as its defects), in common with the English. She records the phenomena which mark the difference, and with a kind of charitable admiration, but with not a spark of humility. In the following extract relative to the musical taste of the English and Italians, we find a proof of this spirit, as well as a distinctive trait of character in the two nations.

In the British Isles, music is a passion with the few, an amusement, or object of mere liking, to the many; but, in Italy, music seems to speak to the heart and soul of every inhabitant of that country. In Florence, rich and poor are alike adorers of the opera. The London artisan, intent on pleasure, hurries off to a third-rate theatre, to luxuriate in the comicalities of some broad farce, or to seek excitement in the exhibition of melodramatic horrors: blue lights, green lights, and red lights are his delight; he loves to see fairies flying in the air; dragons with fiery tails, and magicians with magnificent turbans and splendid beards. Beyond a popular song or two, the tune of which the itinerant barrel organ has made familiar to his ear, he knows little of music; his own attainments in that art being probably limited to humming or whistling "God save the Queen," or some negro melody.

The Florentine artisan, though not inferior in natural intelligence, yet certainly inferior in point of education, seeks for enjoyment in pleasures of a more elevated kind. Passing by with indifference the gigantic placards which announce the performance of some wonderful horse, or the hundredth representation, amidst universal applause, of some laughter-exciting play, he hies with his small savings to the opera house, to listen to the *prima donna's* harmonious strains. Not a note escapes his ear; he listens with every faculty; prepared to applaud or to condemn each vocalist, where praise or blame is due. He can trace the silver thread of harmony through passages where the clue seems lost to a less gifted and cultivated ear, and each note he hears makes a distinct impression on his memory. He feels no fatigue, he knows no tedium, though he listens to the same opera, sung by the same vocalists, for the twentieth time; and the strains thus heard he carries back in mind with him to cheer the weariness of his labor hours. From the carpenter's shop I have heard the finest airs of the "Sonnambula" rise up melodiously in the air; the work-girl, with a power and sweetness of voice which I could not but envy, has sung me the best pieces from the "Traviata" in a truly admirable style; and I knew a maid-servant who could go unerringly through at least twenty operas, from beginning to end. "Music! how I adore music!" is the universal cry in Italy, amongst old and young, rich and poor. According to the principle of the Scandinavian mythology, which made the happiness of heaven for the righteous consist in an endless repetition of the pleasures they had most enjoyed on earth—even as the followers of Odin were to drink mead out of ever-flowing goblets, and to chop off each other's heads, and limbs, and arms to the end of time—so a paradise constructed for Italians on the same plan would necessitate an inexhaustible supply of first-rate operas and *artistes*, with vocal powers equally divine.

There is more philosophical importance attached to the manifestation of points of character among the uncultivated than among the educated. In order to make the contrast between the Italian and the Englishman more striking, and

in connection with occupations more congenial to English tastes, we give an extract quoted by Mr Mill in one of his works.

"Extracts from the evidence of Mr. Escher, of Zurich, (an engineer and cotton manufacturer, employing nearly two thousand working men, of many different nations) annexed to the Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, in 1840, on the training of pauper children:

"The Italians' quickness of perception is shown in rapidly comprehending any new descriptions of labor put into their hands, in a power of quickly comprehending the meaning of their employer, of adapting themselves to new circumstances, much beyond what any other classes have. The French workmen have the like natural characteristics, only in a somewhat lower degree. The English, Swiss, German and Dutch workmen, we find have all much slower natural comprehension. As workmen *only*, the preference is undoubtedly due to the English; because, as we find them, they are all trained to special branches, on which they have had comparatively superior training, and have concentrated all their thoughts. I have an English workman engaged in the erection of a steam engine. He will understand that and nothing else; and for other circumstances and other branches of mechanics, however closely allied, he will be comparatively helpless to adapt himself to all the circumstances that may arise, to make arrangements for them, and give sound advice, or write clear statements and letters on his work in the various related branches of mechanics.

"On the connection between mental cultivation and moral trustworthiness in the laboring class, the same witness, in answer to a question respecting the English workmen, says: 'Whilst in respect to the work to which they have been specially trained they are the most skillful, they are in conduct the most disorderly, debauched, and unruly, and least respectable and trustworthy of any nation whatever whom we have employed (and in saying this I express the experience of every manufacturer on the continent to whom I have spoken, and especially of the English manufacturers, who make the loudest complaints). These characteristics of depravity do not apply to the English workmen who have received an education, but attach to the others in the degree in which they are in want of it. When the uneducated English workmen are released from the bonds of iron discipline in which they have been restrained by their employers in England, and are treated with the urbanity and friendly feeling which the more educated workmen on the continent expect and receive from their employers, they, the English workmen, lose their balance; they do not understand their position, and after a certain time become totally unmanageable and useless. The educated English workmen in a short time comprehend their position, and adopt an appropriate behavior.'

English tests of character and civilization are so often appealed to by the author of "Life in Tuscany," it is well to turn to tests of both by unprejudiced parties.

In conclusion, whatever Italian character may be in the abstract, the Italians represent a noble phase of humanity. The best that can be said for them is that in the administration of the talents intrusted to them by Providence, they employ them as advantageously for the good and glory of humanity as any nation upon the face of the globe.